Proposed Dhammasangayana

With Metta,
Most Venerable Maha Nayaka Theras, Anu Nayaka Theras,
Hon Prime Minister,
Members of parliament &
Repressentatives of Buddhist Organisations.

It was purely with the interest of the Sasana at heart that a proposal to hold a Dhammasangayana (Dhamma Council) was made at the meeting of the Buddha Sasana Consultative Council held at the President's House on 22nd March 1995/2538BE. Although there was no time for a lengthy discussion that day, from the few comments made, it was evident that there was no need for a Dhammasangayana. However, I wish to present my view on the subject once again.

First Dhamma Council

At the time of the passing away of the Buddha, Arahant Mahakassapa was on his way to see the Buddha with other monks when he learnt that Buddha had passed away. On hearing the news those who had attained a higher stage of meditated upon impermanence. Others began to weep. A worldly minded elderly monk expressed joy that the disciplinarian was no longer living and it would now be possible to have their own way.

Arahant Mahakassapa was grieved to hear the elderly monk's remarks and wondered that would happen in the future. Having attended the Buddha's funeral at Kusinara, he summoned tha monks and discussed the gravity of what the elderly mank said. The suggestion made by him to hold a Sangayana was unanimously accepted by the Maha Sangha. 499 Arahants were selected. With Venerable Ananda the number became 500.

The chief lay patron was King Ajatasattu. He built a mansion at Rajagaha and provided all the facilities for the Sangha to conduct the Sangayana.

Five hundred monks led by Arahant Mahakassapa chanted the Tripitaka as it exists today, over a period of seven months.

Second Dhamma Council

One hundred years after the passing away of the Buddha, bonks belonging to the Vajjiputtaka sect started a campaign which was not in keeping with the disciplinary code of the Sangha. They cited ten acts which they claimed were proper and in keeping the the disciplinary rules. Having heard about it Arahant Kakandaputa Yasa examined the implications of this movements and was satisfied that except for one, the rest were in order, However, Arahant Yasa felt that if timely action was not taken, it may lead to more wrongdoings in the future.

The other Arahants also shared his view and felt that a Sangayana be held to discuss the issue. The monks at that time were identified according to the regions they lived in somewhat similar to the up country and low country division today. A committee of eight (four from each region) was formed to resolve the issue. They declared that the ten acts were no in keeping with the code of discipline and recommended that Sangayana be held for future guidance. The decision was accepted by the Arahants. The ruler at the time, king Kalashoka who had taken the side of the Vajjiputtaka monks, having listened to the viewpoint of the Arahants became chief lay patron of the Sangayana.

The Sangayana was presided over by Arahant Sabbakami who had completed 120 Vassana seasons and had seen the Buddha. Seven hundred Arahants participated. The council was held for eight months.

Third Dhamma Council

After the second Dhamma Council, the Vajjiputtaka monks moved away from the Theravada Sangha and formed a separate sect called Mahasanghika. They were quite powerful. As a result, the Theravada monks mound it difficult even to conduct their normal disciplinary acts.

Meanwhile, King Chandasoka became Dharmasoka and was the chief lay parton of the Buddha Sasana. Seeing the fate of the Sasana he used his royal powers and protected the Buddha Sasana. Later under the guidance of Arahant Moggaliputta Tissa the third Dhammasangayana was held. He cleansed the Sasana and sent missionary monks to seven countries and regions including Sri Lanka.

Fourth Dhamma Council

The vast number of sermons delivered by the Buddha was compiled into the Tripitaka in its present form at the first Dhamma Council. The Tripitaka was memorized by the Sangha and preserved. When it was brought into Sri Lanka by Arahant Mahinda, the Sinhala Arahants preserved it in the same way.

A severe famine which lasted 12 years made the Arahants realize that it would be best to preserve the Tripitaka by writing. Thus the Tripitaka was written by 500 Arahants spending around 14 years.

Fifth Dhamma Council

It was after the third Dhamma council that Buddhism spread to many countries including Sri Lanka and Burma. Burma has a huge land area. The population was around 42.5 million, 85% of whom are Buddhists. They took the Tripitaka from Sri Lanka. The fifth Dhammasangayana was held in the city of Mandalay under the patronage of King Ming Dong Mind in 1871 CE. 2400 monks participated.

At the end of the sangayana, the Tripitaka was engraved on marble slabs and preserved. A sum of 150 million in Burmese currency was spent for the project. They remain intact to this day.

Sixth Dhamma Council

Sri Lanka became a Buddhist country following the arrival of Arahant Mahinda. It did not take long for the whole country to be full of Arahants. The Dhamma spread through the Tripitaka in Pali and the Attakatha in Hela. There

were Tikas explaining the deep aspects in the Attakathas. Sri Lanka earned the title of Dhammadeepa due to prosperity both internally and externally.

With the advent of the 2500th year of the passing away of the Buddha, there was a re-awakening of Buddhism both in Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist countries. Burma celebrated the event with a Dhammasangayana.

In Sri Lanka the Buddha Jayanthi was celebrated on grand scale according to a plan discussed with a Maha Sangha. It was a great success. It led to a resurgence of Buddhism in this country. The entire country was overjoyed with the success of the event.

The then Prime Minister, Sri John Kotelawela and his Cabinet of Ministers decided to celebrate the Buddha Jayanthi in a fitting manner and sought the advice of responsible members of the Maha Sangha. Several projects including the translation of the Tripitaka to Sinhala were launched. The general election that followed say Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike becoming the Prime Minister. He appointed the Buddha Sanasa Commission and conducted the Buddha Jayanthi celebrations.

In Burma although a Dhamma Council had been held less than hundred years earlier, the Maha Sangha, academics and Prime Minister U Nu felt it was time to hold a Dhammasangayana again particularly in view of the unsettled state of the country socially, economically and above all, politically. The Maha Sangha accepted and approved the suggestion. Two things had to be fulfilled. Firstly, the monks had to get ready to chant the Tripitaka. Secondly, the laity had to make ready the building and provide necessary facilities.

In the first three Dhamma Councils, he monks chanted the Tripitaka by heart. In the fourth, the monks who had memorized the Tripitaka wrte down and chanted it. The way they chanted in the fifth Council is not known. Having participated I am well aware of how it was done at the sixth Council.

First, a few monks accompanied by the Minister of Buddha Sasana and three laymen came to Sri Lanka and met recognized members of the Maha Sangha,

the Prime Minister and government officials. The suggestion to hold a Dhammasangayana was accepted unanimously. The Maha Sangha prepared the Tripitaka and sent it across.

At that time I was in Burma studying Abhidhamma along with Veneragle Talalle Dhammananda Thera. There were two monks from Ramanna Nikaya also studying Abhidhamma. Six monks from the Supreme Sangha Council in Sri Lanka went over to Burma.

The representatives of the Supreme Sangha Council were told to nominate four to serve on two panels comparing the Tripitaka sent from Sri Lanka with the on in Burma. Venerable Talalle Dhammananda and my self were appointed to one panel. The two Ramanna Nikaya monks were appointed to the other. We accepted the task. What was compared by us were sent up to the Supreme Council for approval for printing. Acting on behalf of Sri Lanka was Venerable Ananda Maitriya Maha Nayaka Thera.

At the first Dhammasangayana it was practice for Arahant Mahakassapa to ask when or where a particular sermon was delivered. Arahant Ananda would then deliver the entire Sutta. It was the same practice which was followed in the sixth Dhammasangayana.

U. Vichittasara Thera was younger to me. We were friends. He had memorized the entire Tripitaka. He demonstrated his skill by chanting what he had memorized four to six hours a day before the Maha Sangha and learned laity. Later he was tested through 100 question papers. He scored 100 out of 100 marks for 94 papers. For the balance six, he scored 90 and above. He was then selected to answer the queries. The questions were to be asked by Mahasi Sayadow.

The venue

Kabaya situated a little away from Rangoon was selected as the venue of the Dhammasangayana. A vast complex comprising of a huge auditorium and a residence for the monks was assigned. The public came forward to work on a

shramadana basis. Even ministers and members of Parliament took part in these shramadana campaigns. There was tremendous enthusiasm throughout the country which led to peace and harmony.

Even though our lessons were affected, it was a great meritorious deed that we participated in. Having taken part in the preliminary work, I got the opportunity to spend 27 days in the world renowned Mahasi Sayadow meditation centre. I went back for the closing ceremony.

Why a Dhammasangayana now

A Dhammasangayana is needed to enthuse the Buddhists just as Buddha Jayanthi did. Today the Buddhists are divided due to various reasons. A Dhammasangayana will help to reduce the disunity among Buddhists. Over 90% of today's Buddhists have not see a Dhammasangayana being held. Thus not only Sri Lankans but Buddhists from all over the world and well wishes will definitely attend.

Sinhalese and Buddhists are fast declining. Non-Sinhalese and non-Buddhists are fast increasing. If there is no resurgence of Buddhism, we are bound to face the same fate as South Korea. 85% of the Koreans were Buddhists at one time. Today the number has dropped to 49%. Some have warned that the same fate awaits us. If we are silent it will definitely happen to us.

The reasons for the first tow Dhammasangayanas were not that serious. However, on both occasions the Arahants played a vital role. Some may wonder why these acts are being repeated over and over again. Some may even say that it is to perpetuate my name. That, of course, is furthest from my mind. I see that if we remain silent the fate of Korea will be on us too. It is happening now – and at great speed.

Among the pledges made by Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike when he faced the general election after forming his own party, was implementation of the recommendations of the Buddhist Committee of Inquiry. He won the election. His

major task immediately after assuming office and the appointment of the Cabinet was the appointment of the Buddha Sasana Commission.

Among other things, he was keen to implement a meaningful programme for the preservation of the Buddha Sasana. He was gunned down at the time the Buddha Sasana Commission was finalizing its report having collected material after traveling the length and breadth of Sri Lanka and visiting Burma, Siam, Cambodia and Laos.

The topics covered in the Commission Report are as follows:

1. The Order of Minks
2. Education of Monks
3. Education of the Laity
4. Buddhist Temporalities
5. Administration of Temple & Devala land
6. Ecclesiastical Courts
7. Buddhist Organization
8. Buddha Sasana Act
9. Miscellaneous.

I wish to submit that these matters should be referred to a committee comprising the Sangha and the laity for the formulation of a plan to suit the present ties. A Supreme Council of the Buddha Sasana can be appointed at the conclusion of the Dhammasangayana to implement such a plan. It is my firm belief that such programme is most essential for the well-being and prosperity of the Sambuddha Sasana and the laity who protect the Sasana.

Faithfully yours,
Madihe Pannasiha Mahanayaka Thera